

Introduction to “ICT4D: ICTs and Sustainable Development” Minitrack

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In 2012 Walsham[1] published an article with the question “Are we making a better world with ICTs?”. Walsham encouraged the information systems community to explore how ICTs could help improve individuals’ capabilities and opportunities, and how to use technology to improve their lives. These questions are at the core of the information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) field that focuses on the use of ICT to foster positive changes for individuals, communities or nations. The focus is on the lives of the poor and marginalized by improving their economy, health, security, education and so on. The field is multidisciplinary and often includes theories from fields such as information systems, development studies, business and political science. That ICTs can foster positive development is widely accepted in the research community. The question now is rather how ICT can contribute to the betterment of the poor and marginalized. However the mechanism by which ICT lead to development is not fully understood. There is also a shortage in the understanding of the role of different stakeholders in development efforts using ICT.

Six papers were accepted for the presentation in this Minitrack. The papers explore various topics in ICT4D such as understanding the role of ICT, assessment of impact, and new research avenues. The summary of the papers are as follows.

In “Understanding ICT in ICT4D: An Affordance Perspective” Thapa and Hatakka propose theory of affordances to unfold the “black box” nature of ICT in ICT4D. This study addresses the question of why ICT in a development context sometimes work and sometimes does not work.

In “Understanding the role of Technology in the Development of Micro-Enterprises: Concepts to study in making a better world,” Qureshi and Xiong argue that many ICT4D projects have failed to make a better world, and present new concepts that can be studied in ICT4D to offer contributions to make a better world.

In “The power of Participatory Photography in ICTD programs: freedom to explore beyond images” Gomez, Gomez and Vannini discuss the contribution of participatory photography as a method to elicit lived experiences from the perspectives of participants in ICT4D research. The method allows participants to add not just description but also context, representations, meanings, feelings and memories, among other interpretations.

In “An Analysis of Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) in Developing Countries: Explaining the Last Two Decades” Park presents a critical view on aid information management systems (AIMS). The study shows that in spite of significant attention given to new technologies and heavy investments made in AIMS, many cases have not achieved the anticipated outcomes and even failed to reach sustainability.

In “Toward an Assessment of Cultural Relativity and Impacts of ICT Interventions: Assessing ICT4D at the National Level” Osei-Bryson and Carter examine the role of ICT impacts and culture on IT decision-making in developing countries. For this purpose, they propose an integrated framework of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions and the Decision Style Inventory into ICT4D security impact assessment.

In “Facebook’s ‘Free Basics’ and Implications for Development: IT Identity and Social Capital” Yim, Gomez, and Carter analyze different uses of Facebook, particularly services provided through Free Basics, and their relation to IT identity and social capital. The paper suggests ways to analyze both the contradictions and contributions of Free Basics to individual and community development, and examine implications for sustainable development.

[1] Walsham, G., *Are we making a better world with ICTs? Reflections on a future agenda for the IS field*. Journal of Information Technology, 2012. 27(2): p. 87-93.